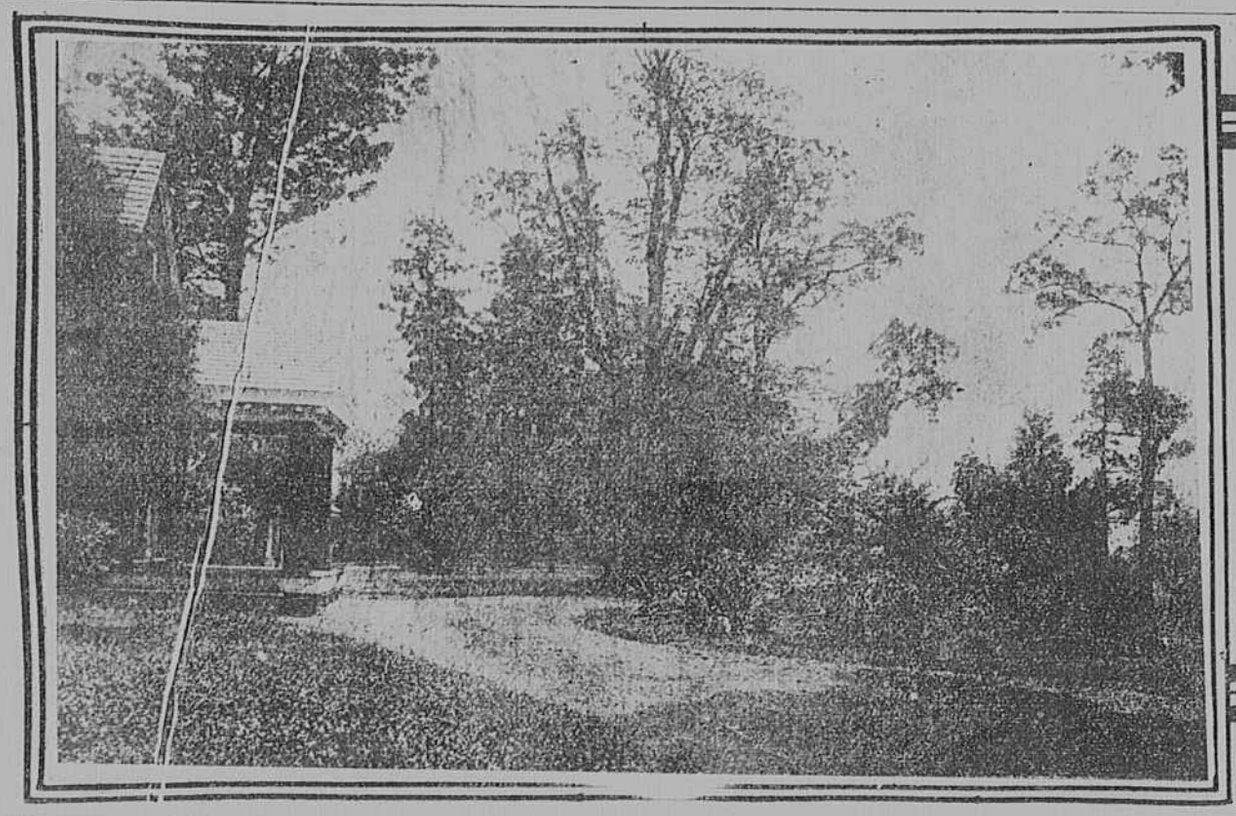
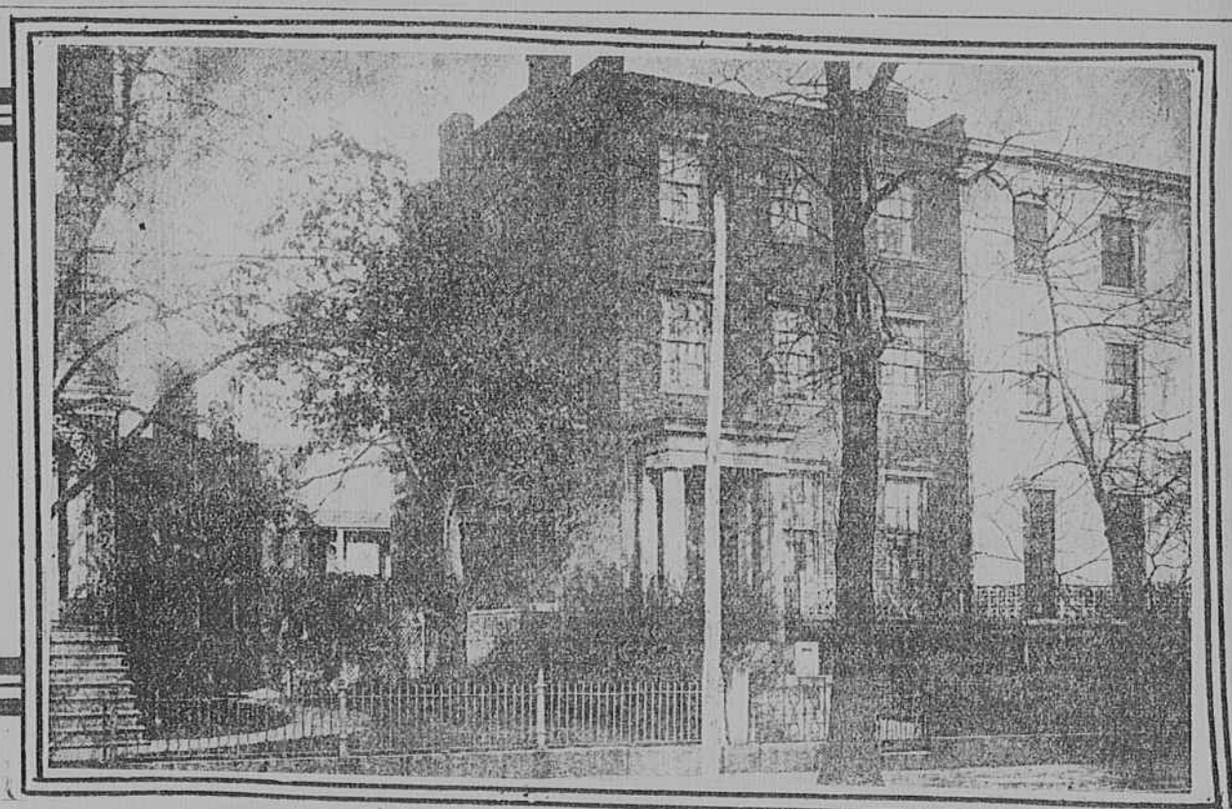
Distinguished Persons Who Have Visited Richmond During the Past Century

BY ALICE M. TYLER



Thompson, on Leigh Street, where Malvern Hill House and garden. The heaviest battle of the Seven Days' Fight around Richmond occurred at this point.



Home of John Reuben Thompson, on Leigh Street, where Thackeray was entertained.
Photo by H. P. Cook.

MISS RITCHIE.

John Reuben Thompson, of Richmond, taken about the time he went to England in 1864.
Photo by H. P. Cook.

THOMAS MOORE.
As he looked when in Richmond.

IT WAS in the year 1803 that Tom Moore, melodious song writer and poet, Irish patriot, steeped in the traditions of his native land, merry of face and of heart, came to Richmond.

Fresh from old world cities, the Irish bard and traveler must have wondered over a somewhat primitive and somewhat sparsely settled town. Its capitol building had been erected some years before, but this same capitol sat barely upon a hill, the Square having not yet been laid off. The population of the city was about six thousand. The Swan Tavern, on Broad Street, near Eighth, and the Washington Tavern, now the Richmond Hotel, were among the main places of public entertainment.

In 1809, just three years before Tom Moore's visit, Main Street was known to be impassable for carriages above Twelfth. In 1802 the First Baptist Church, afterward the scene of famous political meetings and now known as the First African Church, located on Broad Street, below Monumental Church.

The year that Moore arrived in Richmond was made memorable as to city history, because Richmond was, during that year, divided into three wards. The poet was described by Richmond citizens who met him and entertained him in their homes, as a lively, dapper little gentleman, merry of countenance, with twinkling eyes and a responsive smile.

He was always ready to engage in a war of wits and enjoyed all social pleasures, delighting in nothing more than music and hearing the words of his songs fall from the lips of fair vocalists, who rendered them with telling effect on the harp or guitar. Failing these, on the piano.

Under his cordial exterior Mr. Moore carried a warm heart which had been chilled by the lack of welcome in the reception accorded him, when he first landed on American shores. He had possibly formed extravagant expectations and was correspondingly disappointed. In the simple, natural, unaffected hospitality extended to him by citizens and representatives of Richmond, he was compensated for the want of much that he had hitherto looked for and looked in vain.

James C. Johnson, of Langley, Fairfax county, Va., in describing incidents connected with Moore's visit to Virginia, writes that while in Richmond he met William Wickham, who was then a prominent figure in the State Capitol. Mr. Wickham invited Moore to be his guest and showed him great courtesy. It is believed there is possibly a mistake here in the name, and that the Wickham referred to by by Mr. Johnson was John Wickham, the builder and owner of a fine mansion at the southwest corner of Clay and Eleventh Streets, a lawyer who married, as his second wife, one of the lovely daughters of Dr. J. B. McClurg, of Richmond, a woman who was a noted beauty and delightful hostess. John Wickham had, however, a son, William Fanning Wickham, an off spring of his first marriage.

Upon the panels of John Wickham's coach was inscribed the motto: "Manners maketh the man." The motto was exemplified in Mr. Wickham's daily life, he being known as a man of marked suavity and polished manners. He certainly entertained Thomas Moore, who said that the style in which Mr. Wickham lived, would do credit to the establishment of any English nobleman.

But to return to Mr. Johnson's narrative. He goes on to state that "Mr. Moore was moved by the treatment received while in Mr. Wickham's house, to write a poem. The verses were found lying on a writing table after Moore's departure. Received the poem from a grandchild of Mr. Wickham, who also related to me the circumstances which caused it to be written, and kept in the family.

"The verses are contained on one page and the manuscript, frayed and worn at the edges, is held together by a backing of thin canvas, but the ink, grown brown with the lapse of time, still allows the handwriting of the poet to be easily deciphered."

This is what the poem tells:

"Yes I did say on the pine barren view,
As weary I journeyed the wild road along,
Virginia's rude soil, I would glad bid adieu
And never remember Virginia in song.

"I had passed through her towns and no converse had met,
Though in converse my heart knew its fondest delight.
And so firm in my breast had dear friendship been set
That of friendship I thought I might challenge the right."

"But soon was the change when to Richmond I came,
For the stranger here met with a heart like his own,
And he sighs that his verse will ne'er equal its fame,
And give it for friendship the highest renown."

"In the house on the hill a free welcome he found.
The welcome that told him its friendship was true.
And long shall the praise of its master resound,
While gratitude claims from his heart its just due."

"Oh, woman, here too both in beauty and sense
Thou art blessed with the boon which art cannot improve,
Thy looks and thy smiles such sweet favors dispense
That the heart of the stranger is tempted to love."

"Then, Richmond, accept a stranger's farewell!
If the tear of regret of his love be the proof,
Long, long in his heart shall thy memory dwell,
And in age be the theme in the days of his youth."

Mr. Johnson's article and the hitherto unknown poem appeared some years ago in the Bookman. It must be a gratification to all who read the testimony it contains that so favorable an impression was made on the mind and heart of one of the most famous literary men of the early nineteenth century, regarding people and surroundings in the Richmond of more than a hundred years ago.

Doubtless Tom Moore met Thomas Ritchie, the editor of the Enquirer and William Wirt, who married Miss Gamble. Quite certain it is, that he went to the Gamble home and was introduced there to the quality of the town, the young girls, with their charming faces, the Watsons and Gibbons and Taylors and Chevallies, the Winstons and the Christians and Harrisons, the Mayos and Foushees and Adams, the Carringtons and Picketts and Randolphs and Brockenbroughs, the hundreds of others who helped to form a social circle that any city might be proud to own.

Into this group Moore was at once drawn and found a cure for all his previous heartache and disillusions. Into an atmosphere which was mellowed by the charm of courtly dignity, refinement, simplicity and scholarship, enlivened by all the pretty caprices in which the younger generation uttered its protest against the elder, the stranger entered, and was a stranger no longer. It is to be hoped that Richmond will always be as ready to extend a greeting as gracefully hospitable as in the days when Tom Moore penned his verses and in them passed his verdict and discharge his obligation to those with whom he had sojourned, and to others whose acquaintance he had made.

"Lalla Rookh" and the "Odes of Anacreon" are not as familiar to the Richmond man of the twentieth century, as to their more leisured and cultured projenitors of several generations earlier, but hard indeed must be the heart in which Tom Moore's Irish melodies cannot arouse sympathy. Dull indeed must be the ear, on which the sweet strains of "Oft in the Stilly Night" or "The Last Rose of Summer" fell without awakening an emotion, half joy and half sorrow. The Irish singer came and went, but left behind him treasured testimony, in which he has drawn Richmond's portrait for 1803, a portrait, on which men and women of to-day can look with justifiable pride and pleasure.

Washington Irving, a pioneer of American literature, came to Richmond in 1807 and met Chief Justice Marshall, John Randolph, of Roanoke, and other distinguished legal lights, drawn together on Richmond at that time by the Aaron Burr trial. In 1824 came the Marquis de Lafayette, whom Richmond delighted to honor. Across Main Street, at Nineteenth, extended a flowery arch, erected for him to pass beneath. The military of the city turned out to greet the friend of Washington and of the American nation, and the city gave a ball at Eagle Hotel to accord a proper reception to its distinguished guest. At all the handsome private houses in the city Lafayette was entertained, the beauties and belles of the day, esteeming it a privilege to touch the great man's hand and have a word addressed to them by a hero both of the American and the French Revolution.

The year 1840 was memorable because there was great excitement over the Harrison and Tyler Presidential campaign, and the women of Richmond were just as much interested as the men. Daniel Webster and William C. Preston, of South Carolina, were the city's guests and spoke to large audiences of women in a great log cabin built on the site of the Eagle Hotel, which had been burned. The women ordered copies of speeches made to be printed on satin as souvenirs for themselves.

When Dickens Came and Jenny Lind Sang.

Some years had passed, the population of Richmond was more than twenty thousand, the First Baptist Church at Twelfth and Broad Streets had been built and the Exchange Hotel became a pleasant reality, before Charles Dickens and Mrs. Dickens arrived early in the spring of 1842, as has already been noted.

Again the line of progress had been extended. St. Paul's had been opened for worship, John R. Thompson had become editor of the Southern Literary Magazine, and the Richmond Dispatch had been founded by James Cowardin, before Jenny Lind sang her way into the hearts of Richmond people, on December 20, 1850.

John R. Thompson wrote an ode in Mademoiselle Lind's honor, and the Richmond Whig and Advertiser heralded her coming, by announcing that arrangements effected with Barnum's agent would give Richmond citizens the opportunity of hearing this wonderfully gifted Swedish songstress.

Probably present day theatre-goers in Richmond may be curious enough to read with interest what the Whig had to say regarding the concert given by Madamoiselle Lind in Richmond, December 20, 1850. This is its comment:

"We understand that about eleven hundred tickets were sold yesterday at auction, yielding in round numbers about $12,000. These were confined almost exclusively to the parquette and the first and second row of boxes. No tickets on the third tier have yet been disposed of. We doubt whether any concert yet given by Miss Lind in America has averaged so fine a price. No more seats will be sold than can comfortably accommodate the purchasers. We learn that the theatre will be open this morning, between the hours of eight and two, when those not already supplied can procure tickets. Most of the choice seats have of course been sold, but there is still room for many. A considerable number placed upon the stage were purchased on yesterday, but it is probable that some others similarly situated may be offered to-day. Richmond is crowded with strangers anxious to hear the unrivaled queen of song.

"We doubt not, that if it is consistent with Miss Lind's engagements and agreeable to her feelings to prolong her visit in the capital of the Old Dominion, a second concert would be as numerously attended."

We learn that the sum received at the door yesterday amounted to nearly one hundred dollars, which has already been deposited with the mayor for the benefit of the orphan asylum of this city by Mr. Smith, the very gentlemanly and obliging agent of Mr. Barnum."

The Richmond Whig quotes the New York Express which also tells how Mademoiselle Lind was called out before an enthusiastic and fashionable New York audience after everything she sang. "She repeated the Bird songs and Home Sweet Home, introduced the Mountaineer Song and gave the Echo Song, of course. She and Belletti also repeated the duet from il Turco."

That the Swedish Nightingale achieved brilliant success in Richmond is evident from the account given of the Lind concert by the Whig, in these words: "Mad'lle Jenny Lind's concert last night was attended by the largest and certainly the most gratified audience which ever assembled at any public entertainment in this city. Every part of the spacious hall was occupied by eager auditors and high as anticipation had been raised by the superlative repute of the gifted maiden, we doubt if an individual of the immense audience had formed any adequate idea of the enchanting melody, 'dulcet and harmonious breath,' of the peerless songstress. The audience commenced assembling as early as 6 o'clock and, when at last the appearance of Mad'lle Lind gave to reality the place of pent-up expectations, she was greeted with a burst of applause which fairly shook the stout walls of the building. Silence at length was restored and—

"'Effsoons they heard a most delicious sound
Of all that might delight a dainty ear,
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in Paradise be heard elsewhere.
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
To rede what anyone of music that might be;
For all that pleasing is to living ear
Was there consorted in one harmony:
Birds, voices, instruments, enchanting, all agree.'"

Mademoiselle Lind's appearance and concert certainly produced a profound impression upon Richmond and Virginia people who heard her and who long afterwards recalled her exffuisite voice and manner and her gracious white-clad figure, roses in her hair and her hands, when she was led forward to smile her appreciation of the immense ovation rendered her.

Relatives of an old Virginia gentleman who was spending some weeks in New York, took him to a wonderful Wagnerian opera. Realizing the effort that had been made for his entertainment the gallant old fellow aroused himself to hear and to be deeply interested. But when he was later telling the story of his outing at home, shabbily comfortable and at ease, he felt himself at liberty to speak his mind. "These German operas," he said tolerantly, "oh yes, they are well enough in their way, but for a man who heard Jenny Lind sing as I did, when she came to Richmond in 1850—well,—" and he waved his hand, his voice trailed off into vagueness and his eyes grew mistily reminiscent, as his mind wandered back over the track of years to the dear long ago past days of his youth and he felt that silence was eloquent.

The voice of the sweet singer has since been stilled, but fragrant memories of both singer and voice have survived in a city whose heart they thrilled in passing.

Adelina Patti and Ole Bull.

The Richmond press accorded generous space and a splendid tribute to the beauty of the Ole Bull concerts in, which Adelina Patti, then just eight years old, made her first appearance in Richmond, on January 19, 1853. Patti came more than once afterward when she was grown to womanhood, but it is quite safe to say, that never again was she accorded truer homage than when she played her childish part in the brilliant series of Ole Bull concerts.

Thackeray in Richmond.

In the meantime, in March of 1853, Thackeray arrived to lecture in the Athenaeum on Twelfth Street, and give Richmond people their first ideas about the personality of the man who had written "Henry Esmond," "The Virginians" and, above all else, "Vanity Fair."

"I heard Thackeray," said a worthy Richmond citizen, who remembered much else than that it was pleasant to hear.

"What was he like and what did you think about him?"

"I thought him a typical, dignified, English gentleman. He was conventional in appearance and manner and spoke and read clearly, giving evidence of the intellectual power which rendered him such a force in literature."

Thackeray's Richmond Host.

Thackeray was tendered a supper by John Reuben Thompson during his stay in Richmond. Mr. Thompson was then living on Leigh Street, and was a man who formed his literary friendships easily and quickly. His supper for Thackeray was a happy inspiration like his Jenny Lind ode, an episode doubtless long remembered by visitor and host.

Confederate Poet Laureate.

Years afterward, in 1864, Mr. Thompson became the editor of The Index, a journal supported by the Confederate Government, in London England. He was, in his turn, a visitor in the homes of great people identified with nineteenth century intellectual and social activities in England, and was admitted to a charmed circle, composed of Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, Dickens, Dean and Lady Stanley, Miss Thackeray, Sir Edward Landseer, Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle, Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, Dean and Lady Stanley and a hundred more, representing journalistic and diplomatic, as well as intellectual vigor and thought. The reception accorded John R. Thompson as a Richmonder and a Virginian, is something for the people of his native city and State to remember with pride to-day. He had had to resign his position as State Librarian, under the Confederacy, on account of his health. He ran the blockade from Wilmington, North Carolina, but even afterward it was hardly thought he would reach England alive. Instead, he rallied marvelously and was able to do good service to his country's cause, as well as to command the friendship of the foremost English people of the sixties.

Mr. Thompson had been the poet laureate of the Confederacy in Virginia before and after e abandoned his editorial chair at the office of the Southern Literary Messenger. A portion of his London diary, which now forms a part of an invaluable curial library, owned by the late Joseph Bryan, of Laburnum, near Richmond, was edited and published in a fragmentary manner by Mrs. Elizabeth Stoddard, of New York, widow of Richard Henry Stoddard, Thompson's literary executor.

In this journal Thompson describes an afternoon spent in the London home of Thomas and Jane Carlyle as follows:

"Mrs. Carlyle has been for some time an invalid, but made her appearance. Lady Ashburton and Miss Baring came in after tea. Mr. Carlyle said it was his habit to drink five cups of tea. He ran off into table-talk about tea and coffee, told us that he had found in Lord Russell's 'Memoirs of Moore,' which he called a rumbishy book, 'the origin of the word biggin; it comes from one Biggin, a tinner, who first made the vessel and was afterward knighted. Then he talked of pipes and tobacco and recited the old verse, 'Think this, and smoke tobacco.' There was but one honest pipe made in Britain—by a Glasgow man, who used clay found in Devonshire.

"Mr. Carlyle inquired about the Confederacy, its resources, army, its supplies of food and powder. He read a letter from Emerson in which the Yankee philosopher declared that the struggle now going on was the battle of humanity. When we rose to say good-night he called a servant for his coat and boots, he had received us in dressing gown and slippers, and walked with us with in a stone's throw of Grosvenor Hotel, two miles, at half-past 11.

"On the way, passing Chelsea Hospital, he burst into a tribute to Wren, the architect, of whom he said there was a rare harmony, a sweet veracity, in all his work.

"We mentioned Tennyson, and he spoke with great affection of him, but thought him inferior to Burns; he had known 'Alfred' for years; said he used to come in hob-nailed boots and rough coat, to blow a cloud with him.

"Carlyle said he thought Mills's book an Liberty the greatest nonsense he had ever read, and spoke despairingly of the future of Great Britain; too much money would be the ruin of the land."

Mr. Thompson, as has been said, was the poet laureate of the Confederacy. His stay in England ended soon after the downfall of the Confederate government. A few years more and death had claimed the Laureate. His grave was made in Hollywood Cemetery, beside the tumbling waters of the James that he loved so, but well the example of his brave and honorable life and his Confederate poems are immortal in the hearts of his State's people, and in Virginia's Temple of Fame, when it shall be built, the name of John Reuben Thompson will be given a place.

The Prince of Wales.

October 6, 1860, Richmond was all agog over the fact that the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. of England, was to be the guest of the city. The Hon. Joseph Mayo, was the mayor of Richmond at that time and Governor Letcher was in the Executive Mansion.

A selected committee of Richmond citizens accompanied Mr. Mayo when he rode out, to what was then the fair grounds, to receive the Prince who came simply and under an assumed name to the Virginia capital. The distinguished visitor spent a day and night here, was shown prominent points of interest, had quarters at the Exchange, visited the capitol, called to pay his respects to Governor Letcher, attended service at St. Paul's Church, and then took his special train back, in time to fulfil an engagement awaiting him in Washington. City officials and Richmond men who met the prince have always spoken of him as a gracious, extremely agreeable young scion of royalty, highly observant and courteous to all with whom he came into touch. The maturing of his manhood and the full development of his powers were more apparent to strangers in his after years. At the time of his coming to America the gravity of the political situation in a measure overshadowed men's minds, though the prince did not lack for lively diversion nor pretty girls to dance with during the time he was in the United States.

War Time Visitors.

The War Between the States brought a number of titled foreigners into the Confederate service and as visitors to the Confederate Capitol. Among these was Major von Borcke, of Prussia, a splendid specimen of manhood, who became an officer on the staff of General J. E. B. Stuart. Major von Borcke was noted for his dashing bravery. He was seriously wounded but was nursed back to convalescence in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas R. Price. After the war was over this gallant defender of Richmond came back to Virginia and, among those whom he first visited, was the gentle mistress of the Price home, frail in health bearing an added burden of years and responsibility, but ready as ever to clasp in welcome the hand of so brave and so true a Confederate, as the soldier from overseas who served under Stuart and shed his blood for the Southern Cause. There was great mustering of the Confederate clans in Richmond in honor of Major von Borcke. The State had had his sword in charge, and there was a pretty ceremony over its being given back. The services of Sweeney, General Stuart's banjoist, were called into requisition and comrades of the sixties aware fealty with once more. General Fitzhugh Lee among the number.

Then there was Prince Camille de Polignac, who won a deserved reputation on Confederate battlefields, and silenced by his plucky bearing the men who tried to make fun of his name, and mistook him for a curled society darling.

There was Lord Edward St. Maur, who fought under the Confederate flag during the seven days' battles around Richmond, in 1862. The London Times and The Illustrated News were represented in Confederate War days by such men as the Hon. Francis Lawley and Frank Vizitelly.

Then there was Colonel Garnet Wolseley who, not only won the respect of the Confederate officers and men, but who wrote such true praise of General Lee and other Confederate leaders, that he deservedly stands most high in the esteem of all Virginians who remember him, or who know him through his life and his books.

Marquis of Lorne and Princess Louise.

When the Marquis of Lorne was Governor-General of Canada, he and the Princess Louise, his wife, sister of the late King Edward VII, stopped in Richmond for a day and night on their way to the West Indies where the Princess went to escape the rigors of the Canadian winter.

The royal couple said at the Exchange Hotel. The princess, pleading the fatigue of travel and poor health, excused herself from meeting visitors, or being entertained. So the women of Richmond had no chance of meeting her or doing her honor. But the Marquis of Lorne, a fine upstanding specimen of manhood, ruddy of countenance and erect in figure, responded readily to advances made by representative men of the city with whom he went driving. He took luncheon at the Westmoreland Club and went driving during the forenoon and afternoon of a bright, clear day in January of 1883.

Ter-Centenary of Jamestown Guests.

The year 1907, of course brought many visitors from across the Atlantic to Richmond. One of the most notable of these was the Hon. James Bryce, representing the English Government at Washington, D. C. With his wife and niece the ambassador was the house guest of Governor Swanson and Mrs. Swanson, and the guest of honor of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities in the annual excursion of the association to Jamestown Island on May 13, 1907.

The ambassador made an address at Jamestown and seemed in every way to have been glad of the opportunity to see the spot where the courage and faith of Englishmen, three hundred years before had made the beginning, out of which the American nation has since developed.

From the year 1803 to the year 1907,

(Continued on Sixth Page.)